CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A method for automatically acquiring the identity of an user requesting service from a service provider, said method comprising:

said service provider sending an identification request to a network access provider (NAP), said NAP comprising a NAP identification (ID) module and an access system in communication with said NAP identification module; and

said NAP ID module extracting information associated with said user, verifying the network address of said user and forwarding said information associated with said user to said service provider.

2.   The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of sending an identification (ID) request comprises sending the ID request via at least one identification switch.

3.   The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of extracting information comprises the steps of:

verifying whether the network address of the user is included in the ID request; and

if the network address of the user is not included, extracting the network address when the user connects to the NAP.

4.   The method according to claim 3, wherein said step of extracting information comprises the step of:

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retrieving data from a group of databases including an online session database in communication with said NAP and a user information database in communication with said NAP.

5.   The method according to claim 3, wherein said step of extracting the network address comprises the steps of:

detecting a request from the user of a specific URL, said specific URL being identifiable by a plug-in installed in the proxy server of said NAP; and

said plug-in reporting the real network address of the user.

6.   The method according to claim 3, wherein said step of extracting the network address comprises the steps of:

detecting a request from the user of a specific URL, said specific URL being identifiable by a network sniffer installed between the user and the proxy server of said NAP; and

said sniffer reporting the real network address of the user.

7.   The method according to claim 3, wherein said step of extracting the network address comprises at least one of the steps of:

instructing the user to connect to the address extraction module of said NAP via an alternative service or port not associated with the proxy server;

opening a direct connection to said address extraction module; and

by automatically configuring the proxy settings.

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8. The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of forwarding comprises the step of:

> reporting said information associated with said user to said service provider;

9. The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of forwarding comprises the step of:

> verifying information items provided in the identification request; and

> forwards a match score describing the similarity between the information associated with said user and the information items provided in the identification request.

10. The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of forwarding comprises the step of:

> sending a virtual ID for said user to said service provider.

11. The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of forwarding comprises the step of:

> sending information associated with said user in a previous request to said service provider.

12. The method according to claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

> determining the identity of the NAP servicing said user;

> forwarding said identification request to said NAP identification module;

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determining whether said identification request includes the network address of said user; and

if said identification request does not include the network address of said user, extracting the network address when the user connects to the NAP.

13. The method according to claim 12, wherein said step of determining the identity of the NAP comprises the steps of:

maintaining a look-up table of network addresses associated with a plurality of NAPs; and

determining the identity of the NAP by reference to said look-up table.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein said look-up table is updated manually whenever network address assignments change.

15. The method according to claim 13, wherein said look-up table is updated automatically from said NAP identification module based on information reported from said access system.

16. The method according to claim 13, wherein said look-up table is constructed from existing network address assignment databases.

17. A method for automatically identifying an user requesting service from a service provider, said method comprising:

said service provider determining the veracity of the network address reported by the user;

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if said network address is determined to be trusted,

said service provider including said network address in an

identification request and sending said identification request to

a network access provider (NAP), said NAP comprising a NAP

identification module; and

providing service in accordance with said service request; or

if the network address is determined not to be trusted;

said service provider sending an identification request to a

network access provider (NAP) for verifying the network

address of said user; and

forwarding said information associated with said user to said

service provider.

18.   The method according to claim 17, wherein said step of sending an
identification (ID) request comprises sending the ID request via at least one
identification switch.

19.   The method according to claim 18, further comprising the steps of:

determining the identity of the NAP servicing said user;

forwarding said identification request to the NAP identification

module associated with said identified NAP;

determining whether said identification request includes the network

address of said user; and

if said identification request does not include the network address of said user, extracting the network address when the user connects to the NAP.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein said step of forwarding comprises the steps of:

configuring at least one network appliance to route specific requests to a specified NAP; and

the NAP identification module associated with said specified NAP identifying said user.

21. The method according to claim 20, wherein said at least one network appliance comprises one of a group including an HTTP proxy and a WAP Gateway.

22. A system for automatically acquiring the identity of the user of an anonymous network, said system comprising:

a service provider in communication with said user; and

at least one network access provider (NAP) in communication with said service provider and said user; said at least one NAP comprising:

a NAP identification module comprising:

a controller; and

an address extractor in communication with said controller; and

an access system in communication with said address extractor.

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23. The system according to claim 22, further comprising at least one online session database in communication with said controller and said access system, said at least one online session database containing at least information associating said user with the user's network address.

24. The system according to claim 22, wherein said at least one NAP is in communication with said service provider via at least one identification switch.

25. The system according to claim 22, further comprising at least one user information database, in communication with said controller.

26. The system according to claim 25, wherein said at least one user information database comprises at least one of a group of databases containing data including personal details related to said user, billing information, information about past user logins, and a reverse telephone directory.

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